

LONDON STONE.

"It is so sure a Stone that that is upon sette,
For though some have it thrette,
With Menaces grim and grette,
Yet Hurte had it none;
Cryat in the very stone,
That the Cille is set upon,
Which from al his Poesse
Hath ever preserved yt."

So singeth Master Fabian, with more good will, belike, than harmony, and possibly among the several characters ascribed to this mysterious stone, whereof many have conjectured, but none professed to state precisely, the origin, that of a Christian monument, according to the old City chronicler, may have likewise appertained to it.

But it is to an earlier period that we are to carry our inquiries as to its original use and destination.

Wren, who had opportunities for practical investigation, which might have done much toward the knowledge of ancient London, in the hands of a better antiquary, found, in the immediate neighbourhood of this stone, such extensive remains of buildings, evidently Roman, as led him to assert, supposing it to be the milliarium or standard milestone, similar to that in the Forum at Rome, that it partook of a more extensive form, and appeared, in some degree, to have imitated the Milliarium Aureum, at Constantinople, which was not merely a pillar like that at Rome, but a roofed building.

Now, granting the roof, which is, indeed, a thing quite probable, we may suppose an edifice very much like an old market-cross. The goodly stone, of which but a morsel now survives, would form the central pillar; conceive this, surrounded by a platform with steps, and having a pent or roof, supported by a series of inferior columns, and you have a building of a Roman character, and withal the model, perchance, of those central crosses which date from a period as early, for aught that is known, as that of the Saxons, who learned the forms of architecture from their Roman predecessors. And now, good reader, you may set up statues of Fortune and Mercury, for we will conclude this not only to have been the point whence branched off the principal highways, but that it was likewise the place of eloquence, where proclamations were addressed to the populace. You may add, likewise, if it seemeth so to behave you, the statue of the Emperor Theodosius, in whose honour the name of the ancient city, Latinised into Longidinium, according to Antinious, or otherwise Londinium and Londinium, from the elements of its Celtic denomination, was for a time suspended, and that of Augusta bestowed upon it instead.

But—for we have begun somewhat before the beginning, so far as matter of surmise is concerned—let us now take an earlier view of this renowned city. Imagine we, then, a space cleared from the primeval forest. The various tribes of the early inhabitants living in a state of a predatory warfare, some natural defence was necessary to a people who had not learned the art of building walls, or constructing artificial bulwarks much more efficient than the stockade or fence of felled trees surrounding the village. The site of this primitive city is accordingly chosen so as to be protected on all sides: the Thames on the south, and on the north the marshes, afterwards known as Fensbury, were traversed by certain rivers running into the former, and forming the boundaries of the settlement.

A street of hovels runs east and west, leaving a space in the centre, and in this space stands a perpendicular mass of unhewn stone, even such as they of yore set up for worship and sacrifice in the East, and similar to the grey and solitary pillars which appear in those waste moors of Cumberland and other parts of England, and furnish the untaught peasant with the theme of many a wild tale and fabulous legend. This particular stone, standing in the midst of London or Llyn-thun, the unhewn altar of the Druidic hierarchy, was then, gentle reader, upon the authority of, "it has been supposed," no other than the identical London Stone.

And, verily, it is a pleasant supposition; and let us only adopt it as such, and belike it will soon amount to a belief; and why should not the judicious antiquary have his pet weakness to cherish like a foundling, hugged all the more closely the more it is rejected of others? Marry, good friend, the thing is wholesome,

and in this shrine will we lock up all our credulity. The Romans took, then, this venerated monument, and dedicated it to those tutelary deities who presided over the destinies of wayfarers, and all such as would propitiate the goddess Fortune.

Having made this declaration of faith, it now behoves us to descend from our altitudes, and betake us to some inquiry concerning what history sayeth touching this, our subject, and eke what tradition, which latter is but an unwritten history, and therefore unsophisticated, and oft-times nearer to the naked truth. Before the time of the Conquest, then, and that is a fair starting-point to begin with facts, thus sayeth worthy John Stowe:—"In the end of a faire written Gospell booke, given to Christ's Church, in Canterbury, by Ethelstane, king of the West Saxons, I finde noted of Lands or Reots in London, belonging to the said church, whereof one parcell is described to lye neere unto London Stone."

London Stone, be it said, stood not, of yore, in its present place, but on the other side of Watling-street, which was formerly one of the three great thoroughfares running east of Roman London. There was an open space where several streets met, and surrounding which were the markets which supplied the city with provision, such being the only legal markets according to a decree of Hammond Chickwell, in the reign of Edward II., which sets forth that "none should sell fish or flesh out of the following places, viz., Bridge-street, Eastcheap, Old Fish-street, St. Nicholas Shambles, and the Stocks-market," the latter so designated by virtue of the provision made there in order to chastise and expose all cheating huxters, and such cozening knaves as dealt not honestly in their wares, according to the law of the Pied Poudre Court. This was the region of good cheer, for here, said Lydgate,

"Pewter pots they clattered on a heap;
There was harp, pipe, and minstrelsy."

There were ribbes of beef roasted, and pies well baked, and, while the substantial and strong-flavoured meats were ever ready to appease the hunger of the churl, the more dainty and appetising viuers, such as spiced frumety, carpe in fuile, larks ingraylede, and many other toothsome refectiouns, were forthcoming at the call of gallants from the patrician purloons of St. Catherine's Tower Royal, and Baynard's Castle.

Nor was good sack lacking to boot, be thou witness, shade of fat Jack! but thou never could'st become a shade. Here revelled, if Will Shakspeare speaketh sooth, hotheaded Prince Hal and his frolicksome playfellows. The atmosphere is still redolent of canaries, and the nose of Bardolph sheds a fiery splendour over the spot like the livid effulgence of a stormy sunset.

But the glory of Eastcheap is departed, the Boar's Head is no more, and they who would behold its former site may seek it well nigh, even at the feet of King William's statue.

In the Saxon times and downwards, ere London had a Bourse, or Exchange, the font of St. Paul's and London Stone seem to have been resorted to for the ratification of various transactions; and a promise to pay a debt upon London Stone appears to have imparted an additional solemnity to the obligation, by the nomination of the locality where it was to be fulfilled, the shadow of its early sanctity probably taking the colour of the successive religious changes it had witnessed, until it was finally invested with a degree of Christian reverence, according to the spirit of the times.

Moreover, its great antiquity, for few men are without something of the spirit of antiquarian veneration, however little they may be conscious of it, may have given to it, in the minds of the citizens, something of that importance which is supported by an indefinite superstition.

It had thus become in the eyes of men, as it were, in some sort, the foundation-stone of the city, even as Fabian suggests, being the oldest visible object there existing—a thing by which the city and its greatness were to stand or fall, wherefore, as it hath been recited, treaties were there ratified in good faith between man and man, proclamations made, and all matters relating to boundaries begun and ended there.

In the same spirit, that arch rebel, Jack Cade, when he entered London at the head of the Kentish insurrection, marched to this place, and, in the presence of a great concourse of people, struck his staff on London Stone, exclaiming, "Now is Mortimer lord of this city!" "And here, sitting upon this stone," &c., adds Shakspeare, who wist somewhat of the gootic meanings of things, thereby implying, that, although a more dignified orator would have stood upon the stone or the platform thereof, if such existed, the would-be Mortimer, inspired, forsooth, with the putting down kings and princes, must loiter at his ease, while he addresses a swaggering oration to his quaking worship, the mayor, and issues this lordly ordinance,

"I will make it felony to drink small beer."

The last notices of this ancient and solemn monument appear in this wise:—"On the south side of this high street, near unto the Channell, is pitched upright a great stone, called London Stone, fixed in the ground very deepe, fastned with barres of iron, and otherwise so strongly set, that, if Cartes doe runne against it through negligence, the wheels be broken, and the stone itselfe unshaken." This is its appearance according to Stowe.

And now the latter days fell heavily upon the venerable relique, which was at length overthrown, and in a dark age, and by the sentence of wicked men, without awe or veneration, doomed to destruction, as a nuisance!

But at this crisis there arose a bold and goodly hero (upon whose memory be every honest antiquary's benison), by name Thomas Maiden, of Sherbourne-lane, printer. This worthy moved the authorities, even the parish officers, to its preservation, which act of righteousness was fulfilled in the year 1798, whereby London may be said, in a figurative sense, to continue standing upon its ancient foundation.

And now, worthy reader, having detailed for your instruction as much as is chronicled of London Stone, and, perchance, somewhat more, in the process of this discourse, behold it shifted, and degraded from its dignity and uses, even where it hides its diminished head, curiously enshrined in a case of freestone. It seemeth but a little bit of what would appear to have been of a goodly bulk formerly; but remember that the unsparing wheels of fifteen centuries, if not many more, have passed over it, and even still it may be bigger than you wot of, for though we peep thus at its venerable crown, which is somewhat greater than your head though by no means as large as the dome of St. Paul's, yet may there be much more below ground, and enough, perchance, to serve as a goodly bulwark to that part of the church wall against which it standeth.

In curiously surveying the site there will, likewise, be seen another object which partaketh somewhat of the spirit of the earlier time, yea, the days when labouring men might rest awhile on their wayfaring, under heavy burdens, ere it had been ordained that all things had to be done in breathless speed and haste. This is a porter's shelf, many of which are now removed, but which presented formerly numerous invitations to the weary, accompanied by certain sage admonitions to boot, daintily imprinted to this effect, "Don't forget your parcels." Underneath we may find, lazily prolonging his rest even unto the pitch of snoring, an unbristly member of the fraternity of London porters, who has, mayhap, essayed to carry too much of his namesake, over and above the sufficient load upon the shelf, and now wots but little of things ancient and modern, nor even of the preservation of his shins in a populous thoroughfare.—*Illuminated Magazine.*

STIR IN THE SCHOOL OF DESIGN.—The papers which have appeared in our columns on the state of the School of Design have excited very lively interest, serving to shew that a large number of our readers consider it as it really is, a subject of considerable importance. We have now before us statements of an extraordinary character bearing upon it, but feeling the possibility of committing injustice, both correspondents and readers must pardon us for postponing the consideration of them for another week.